




Child Marriage in Indonesia

Extensive Country Report
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List of Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Introduction



Girls posing with campaign posters to stop child marriage, with one poster translating to “a child should not have a child.” Source: Aditya Pradana Putra/ANTARA FOTO, 2021.

Indonesia is among the top ten countries with the highest rates of child marriage under the age of 18 years. Indeed, one out of nine girls in the country gets married before their 18th birthday (UNICEF, 2020). It’s concerning since studies have shown that girls who get married before the age of 18 are four times less likely to graduate from secondary education (UNICEF, 2020). As mentioned by Nadiem Makarim, Minister of Education and Culture, in the National Seminar in 2021, “child marriage can deprive the rights of and opportunities for children to access quality education and get decent work to build a prosperous life” (Dewi & Katriana, 2021). Additionally, it can be seen that girls who marry before the age of 18, tend to have fewer decision-making powers in the household as well as are more exposed to experiencing domestic violence. On top of that, there are many physical and mental health issues that arise from child marriage. For example, pregnancy and the fact that childbirth is the leading cause of death for girls between the ages of 15 and 19 (UNICEF, 2020).

Child marriage has been a common tradition throughout Asia, however with much effort from charities and international organisations, the numbers started to reduce slowly (Fardah, 2021). The Indonesian government itself has said it wants to combat and reduce the rates of child marriage to at least 8.7 by 2024 from the previous 11.21 in 2018 and to further reduce it to 6.9 by 2030 to meet the Sustainable Development Goals that were set by the UN (Fardah, 2021). In accordance with this commitment, the Ministry of National Development Planning of Indonesia and the Ministry of Woman Empowerment

and Child Protection set up a national strategy for child marriage prevention in 2021 (Fardah, 2021).

The process was brought to an abrupt halt with the appearance of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. This was also confirmed by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) which stated that the pandemic triggered the increase of numbers in child marriage as it forced children to stay at home which led to them dropping out, getting work, or getting married (Fardah, 2021). This is largely due to the fact that even after the legal age for marriage was raised to 19 for girls, there are still loopholes in place such as getting approval from a local religious court.

This extensive country report intends to showcase the devastating situation that is happening to girls and boys in Indonesia. The report will discuss about the historical and cultural background of child marriage in Indonesia and the past legal framework covering child marriage. Another part of this report will be focused on the existing legal framework in Indonesia as well as the international standards that Indonesia is required to meet. The last section of the report will explain the reason why families are pushed towards marrying their child too early, the consequences that child marriage have and lastly, how the government, public institutions and domestic human rights organisations are responding to this issue.

History of Child Marriage in Indonesia

While the legal age limitation differs from country to country, child marriage is generally understood as a formation of a union or marriage whereby one or both of the individuals are under the age of 18 years (UNICEF, 2022). Both boys and girls can and have been affected by child marriage. However, girls are generally more affected and involved in marriages under the legal age limit. Throughout most of history until the 20th century, child marriage has been part of many countries and cultures throughout the world. This also had to do with the fact that life expectancy was much lower back then, such as only 40 to 45 years old, and therefore, also the time to build a family was shorter than nowadays. This meant that girls were married off as soon as they hit puberty and sometimes even earlier (Sen Nag, 2017).

With the change to the 20th century, girls started to receive more education, receive voting and other rights, more girls entered the workforce, more economic stability and with the immense advancement of modern medicine their average life expectancy also increased drastically. Many countries slowly saw the practice of child marriage nearly disappear however, some countries, still have many cultures where the practice continues to happen to many young girls. Nowadays, many countries have made the practice of child marriage illegal practice and the United Nations has recognised it as a violation of basic human rights (Bemmelen & Grijns, 2019).

The conversation surrounding child marriage in Indonesia essentially began in 1890, when the case of Nursama, an eight-year-old girl who was married off to her uncle, was reported by a Dutch official to the local court or *landraad* (Bemmelen & Grijns, 2019). As her husband, the uncle had “violated” her (it was implied that he had raped her) in such a way that it had taken her a full three months to completely recover (Bemmelen & Grijns, 2019). He was subsequently sentenced to 15 years of forced labour in chains, for the rape of a child under the age of 15 (Bemmelen & Grijns, 2019). The Supreme Court (*Hoggerectshof*) in Batavia revoked the previous court’s ruling as at that time, the concept of domestic rape was “unthinkable”, even in the case of child marriage (Bemmelen & Grijns, 2019). A Leiden-based professor, George Alexander Wilken, contested the decision of the Supreme Court, stating that while child marriage was a common practice in the archipelago, the consummation for marriage was usually postponed until the bride experiences puberty, which means that the man had not heeded the traditional custom of *kawin gantung* and should be found guilty (Bemmelen & Grijns, 2019).

The case sparked widespread debates. One of them surrounds whether or not child marriage should be accepted as a custom (*adat*), free from colonial state interferences, and the other is regarding the definition of child marriage in itself. Local customs consider a union as a child marriage when the

bride has not yet reached puberty, which differ from the standardised legal age limitation set for the European population in the colony: 15 for girls and 18 for boys.

The perception towards child marriage in the country had started to shift by the 1900s. In the 1914 report published by the colonial state commission on the elevation of Indigenous women in Java and Madura, six out of the nine Javanese and Sundanese women who contributed to the report expressed condemnation of the practice of child marriage. Raden Ajoë Soegianto called for the abolition of the custom, a sentiment that was shared by the midwife Djarisah and R.A. Dewi Sartika, who denounced the custom as a social cancer. However, the implementation of legal measures to abolish child marriage did not seem to be popular at that time, as some considered it to “contravene religious belief.” Instead, education and dissemination of information on the dangers of child marriage were a more favoured route. In the end, there was no minimum age set but rather the understanding made that a girl no earlier than puberty should be of marriageable age. Indonesia struggled until its independence with its unclear views on a suitable age for marriage (Bemmelen & Grijns, 2019).

In 1915, the government revised the Penal code and added an article that was aimed at protecting girls from early marriages. However, the text did not set a minimum age limit. It describes a situation, in which knowledgeable sexual intercourse with a girl who is not yet of marriageable age is punishable by four years imprisonment. This law was never enforced and also never surveilled or protected by the police (Bemmelen & Grijns, 2019).

In 1937, after the protest of women’s organisations and the Christian Indonesian populations that started emerging in the 1930s, the colonial government finally drafted a section on a fixed minimum age for marriage. This was followed by immense protests from Muslim organisations. Due to that, the government ended up not pushing through with the draft and decided to keep it on hold until next year (Bemmelen & Grijns, 2019).

1. For children who had not yet reached the minimum age for marriage, permission to marry could be requested from and granted by the Governor General (Burgerlijk Wetboek 1847, Art. 4 (85)).

Not long after Indonesia gained its independence, the newly formed government pushed to reform the marriage law of the country. It was to bring all ethical, religious and other cultural differences that the country had since colonial times into one codified marriage law. It set the minimum age for girls at 15 and for boys at 18 years old and it also restricted polygyny (Bemmelen & Grijns, 2019). However, this proposed draft was not accepted by the Muslim community. They were presented with subsequently three separate different drafts, two specifically for the Muslim community (Bemmelen & Grijns, 2019). Consensus was finally reached with the Marriage Law in 1974 with the minimum age being 16 years old for women and 19 for men. Additionally, the new legal framework also promoted that marriage was based on consent from both marriage parties, in an effort to ban forced marriages (Ratri, 2017).

Nowadays, Indonesia has ratified many international conventions that are working toward the abolishment of child marriage. Moreover, with the enactment of the Child Protection law in 2002, the government have been taking more serious steps in their effort to end child marriage in the country.

Legal Framework

This section will review both the international and domestic legal frameworks that govern the practice of child marriage. It will explore the definitions of child marriage, the human rights that may be involved in the practice of child marriage, as well as the standards of protection against the practice.

a. International Legal Framework

The practice of child marriage is a multifaceted issue that may involve violations of multiple human and children's rights protected under a number of human rights conventions. The UDHR, the leading international human rights covenant, stipulated that marriage shall only be entered into with the free and full consent of the spouses (Article 2) and that men and women who are of age are the only ones whose rights to marriage are protected without any limitation (Article 16), indicating that marriages shall be between consenting adults (United Nations, 1948). Similar sentiments were echoed in other international covenants such as the ICCPR (Article 23) and the ICESCR (Article 10).

Considering, as mentioned, girls are primarily affected by the practice of child marriage, the CEDAW also included a number of articles that called on State Parties to protect girls against the practice. Indeed, Article 16 paragraph two of the CEDAW provided an explicit prohibition against child marriage, stating that “the betrothal and marriage of a child shall have no legal effect” and that States must take “all necessary action” to specify an age limitation for marriages and to make registration of marriages compulsory (CEDAW, 1981). The CRC followed suit ten years later, stating in Article 24 paragraph three that “States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children,” which the Committee on the Rights of the Child later elaborate in its General Comment No. 4 as including early marriages (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003).

The right to be free from slavery may also be violated in certain extreme cases. Indeed, Article 1 of the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery stated that States must abolish

“Any institution or practice whereby a child or young person under the age of 18 years, is delivered by either or both of his natural parents or by his guardian to another person, whether for reward or not, with a view to the exploitation of the child or young person or of his labour.”

(Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1965)

b. Domestic Legal Framework



Sri Danti Anwar of the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection and Deepa Bharathi of UN Women at the CEDAW Regional Consultation in May 2016 commemorating 32 years since Indonesia's ratification of CEDAW Source: Adrian Mulya/ UN Women Indonesia via flickr, 2016.

Indonesia is a party to all of the main UN human rights treaties, including CRC and CEDAW, and therefore it is bound by international obligations to eradicate the practice of child marriage in the country (United Nations, n.d.). Following the ratification of the CRC in 1990, Indonesia issued Law No 23 of 2002 on Child Protection, which was later amended by Law No 35 of 2014, as the primary law that concerns the protection of children in Indonesia. The law provides protection towards children's rights that may be affected through child marriage such as the right to live, grow, evolve, participate and be protected from harm or discrimination (Article 4), right to education (Article 7 paragraph 1), as well as the right to be protected from discrimination, sexual and economic exploitation, neglect, cruelty, violence, torture, injustice and other wrongful acts while under the care of their parents, guardians, or anyone else (Article 13 paragraph 1) (Law No 23 of 2022 on Child Protection, 2002).

Unfortunately, even after this foundation that protects the rights of the child, laws governing child marriage in the country remained inconsistent until very recently (Rumble et al., 2018). This is particularly due to the differing age limitation for marriage across regulations. For instance, the 2002 Child Protection Law prohibits any child to get married before the age of 18 (Law No 35 of 2014 on the Amendment of the Law Number 23 of 2002 on Child Protection, 2014). However, Article 7 paragraph 1 of Law No 1 of 1974 stipulates that the minimum age for marriage, with prior parental consent, is 16

years old for girls and 19 years old for boys (Law No 1 of 1974 on Marriages, 1974). The law was only amended in September 2019 after Indonesia's parliament unanimously voted to raise the legal age of marriage for girls from 16 to 19 years old, matching the age limitation for boys (Republic of Indonesia, 2019). This amendment was made after the country's Constitutional Court ruled the previous age limitation for girls unconstitutional, which was a result of decades of campaigning (Deonath & Gralki, 2019; Putusan No 22/PUU-XV/2017, 2018).

However, in practice, child marriage may still be considered legal in Indonesia. Article 7 paragraph 2 of Law No 1 of 1974 states that "in the case of deviations in paragraph (1) to this article, one can ask for a dispensation from the Court or other officials requested by the parents of the male or female parties" (Law No 1 of 1974 on Marriages, 1974). Even then, whether there is parental consent or not is not a deciding factor in deciding whether a marriage where one or both parties are minors can be considered legal. Paragraph 3 of the same article states that in case the parents of the minor(s) have passed or have become unable to state their consent, permission may be obtained from "a guardian or a family member who has blood relations in a straight line of descent" (Law No 1 of 1974 on Marriages, 1974).

This dispensation system is still in place, partly due to the fact that Indonesia has a pluralistic legal system, in which both Islamic and customary law is recognised as part of the legal system (Salam, 2017; Warman et al., 2018). For instance, there is no fixed age limitation for marriage in Islamic law, but marriage is generally considered legal if both spouses have experienced puberty (*baligh*), have common sense, and are able to distinguish between good and bad (Zulfiani, 2017). Similarly, customary law does not have a minimum age for marriage. Instead, a person's readiness for marriage is often measured by signs of physical maturity (for girls, whether they have menstruated and have grown breasts and for boys, when their voices change or they're experiencing signs of sexual awakening) (Zulfiani, 2017).

To ensure the rights of the child during the judicial process of obtaining a dispensation, the Supreme Court published Regulation of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia Number 5 of 2019 on Guidelines for Adjudicating Applications for Marriage Dispensation on November 20th, 2019 (Jamik, 2020). The regulation is meant to provide guidance for judges in deciding dispensation for marriages where one or both people are under the age of 19 (Supreme Court Regulation No 5 of 2019 on Guidelines for Adjudicating Applications for Marriage Dispensation, 2019). Under this regulation, judges must consider the core principles of the CRC such as the best interest of the child, their right to be heard, non-discrimination, gender equality and the evolving capacities of the child in every step of the examination. This includes identifying whether the child knew of and approve of the marriage, examining the health and psychological condition as well as the readiness of the child, as well as examining whether there

was any psychological, physical, sexual, or economic coercion that forces the child and/or their family to agree to the marriage. Other things to be considered by the judge in making their decision include the background and reasoning for the child's marriage, the child's understanding of marriage, and the age gap between the groom and the bride. During the examination, the child may also ask to be heard in the absence of their parents, to be accompanied by a companion, to receive a recommendation from a psychologist or doctor, a social service professional, a social welfare officer, the Integrated Service Center for the Empowerment of Women and Children, or the National and Regional Commission on the Protection of the Child, as well as have access to translators or people that are used to communicate with children.

The root causes of Child Marriage



Marsuki (L) with his underage wife Imani (not her real name) watching television at their parent's house in the village of Pokkang in Mamuju, West Sulawesi. Source: Yusuf Wahil/AFP Photo, 2020.

In Indonesia, marriage is considered one of the most important phases in life and plays a significant role in social life. There are many factors which push children to conduct a marriage: poverty, lower education levels and rural residence, but also rigid gender norms, and cultural traditions. Religion, ethnicity, and other geographical factors may also play an important role.

a. Poverty, lower education, and rural residence

Poverty is a major factor underlying child marriage in Indonesia. Many families believe that marriage will secure their daughters' futures and in their best interest, despite their young age. If the bride's family is in a situation of extreme poverty, the daughter may be considered a heavy financial burden, therefore, child marriage is seen as a way to alleviate their desperate economic condition.

Many families in Indonesia decide to arrange marriages with men from wealthy families, not only to have one less mouth to feed and one less education to fund but also because they will receive money in exchange for the bride; a younger girl will probably have more time for her new family and may have more children, so her family may get a higher bride price. Brides can be also seen as a means for settling family debts or disputes or securing social, economic, or political alliances (UNFPA, 2012). Poor families may see child marriage as economically beneficial, however, only in the short term since it does not provide financial security in the future. For the brides, marriages can be seen as a way out of poverty and an improved economic status in the long term.

A recent study from BMC Public Health found that girls who live in rural areas in Indonesia are more likely to be married before the age of 18 (Efevbera & Bhabha, 2020). In this country, unfortunately, a higher level of education is available only in urban areas, where youth development programmes are concentrated, leaving rural areas underexposed to such programmes, where infrastructure, such as school buildings, is very limited. Therefore, children have limited space to entertain themselves, while their parents struggle to meet basic needs, as economic activities are not readily available in their areas. Hence, getting married seems to be the most logical decision (Ratri, 2017). Without access to education, girls are unable to develop the knowledge and confidence to make important decisions for their lives, including whether, when and whom to marry.

Unequal gender norms also have an influence on the spread of child marriage. Since these norms put a higher value on boys and men than on girls and women, families may decide to invest more in their son's education and development, than in their daughters. As such, parents and community leaders may consider education unnecessary for their primary role as wives and mothers.

Poverty is not only one of the key causes of child marriage but also an ongoing consequence of it (World Vision Australia, n.d.). Not only is child marriage more common in case of insufficient education it also leads to a high dropout rate. As a matter of fact, in Indonesia, data show that child marriage causes young women to be four times more likely not to complete secondary education (Tehputri, 2018). Child brides are disempowered, without education, they are unable to make informed decisions about important and numerous aspects of their lives, both regarding the welfare of their children and their own safety and they are less able to lift themselves and their families out of the cycle of poverty.

b. Cultural traditions and the stigma of 'Premarital Sex'

Child marriage is often supported by religious or cultural beliefs and practices and is based on culturally rooted sexual and gender norms, and traditional customs. These marriages are encouraged and supported by notions of sexual morality, decent girlhood, and marriageability, that place girls in a problematic position as objects of shame, blame, virtue, and family honour. A survey in Sukabumi and West Lombok among girls between 15 and 24 years old showed that 89.1 per cent of the married respondents made the choice to get married by themselves (Pakasi, 2019). The main reason that led to this decision is to avoid premarital sex, or 'zina', and premarital pregnancy. The fact that such acts are also strictly prohibited in Islam, the majority religion, adds to them being seen as a taboo and a disgrace, not only for the girl but for the whole family. The taboo nature of premarital pregnancy coupled with the fact that abortion is essentially illegal in the country has made marriage a popular solution to maintain the girl's and her family's honour.

In West Lombok, if a girl is seen dating a boy outside her home, she is called an ‘easy girl’, or ‘bad girl’ (‘cabe- cabean’). Some of the girls stated that they decided to get married to avoid losing their boyfriend and becoming an ‘old spinster’, due to the belief that everyone has a soulmate, and rejecting them may cause difficulties in finding one in the future. Girls would prefer to get married young than not get married at all, since spinsters are seen as a shame for the family and are often mocked by neighbours (Pakasi, 2019).

Although in these cases girls stated that the choice to get married was theirs, the circumstances surrounding them contributed to this decision. Marriage may ease the family’s financial burden, and the limited options for the girls in the future make marriage and the creation of their own family an attractive option. For the girls who already had premarital pregnancies, marriage was necessary in order to make up for the disgrace caused to their families and save their honour.

Due to this view of premarital sex as a disgrace for the girl and for her family, when girls get pregnant out of wedlock, they are often forced to marry their sexual partner, regardless of whether or not the girl was of legal age to consent to sexual intercourse or whether the pregnancy is the result of a rape. Hence, in many cases, girls are obliged to marry their rapists, to avoid bringing shame to their family’s honour.

c. The psychological aspect of consent in child marriage

Choosing when and whom to marry is one of the most important decisions in life, a decision that should be made freely, informed, and, in particular, it should be made when ready, as adults. Many child brides are still too immature to understand what marriage, and the burden of being a wife and a mother at such a young age could entail. They agree to get married under the influence of the family, their traditions and society, and they find themselves exposed to a premature and unnatural end of their childhood and adolescence, adult roles and responsibilities are imposed on them, before they are physically, psychologically, and emotionally prepared (UNFPA, 2012).

As a matter of fact, international law considers child marriage as a form of forced marriage, given that one and/or both parties have not expressed full, free, and informed consent (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women & Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2014). Once they get married, they live far away from their homes and families, often without any financial capacity and, for this reason, are more likely dependent on their husbands or their husbands’ families, therefore, more prone to abuse due to their lack of bargaining power in the relationship.

Consequences of Child Marriage

Child marriage has devastating impacts first and foremost on young girls, but also on men, children, and communities as a whole. Such marriages are associated with higher rates of domestic violence, health issues and illiteracy.

a. Higher risk of both physical and sexual domestic violence, including marital rape

According to a report by the International Center for Research on Women, “girls who were married before 18 were twice as likely to report being beaten, slapped, or threatened by their husbands than girls who married later. They were three times as likely to report being forced to have sex without their consent in the previous six months” (International Center for Research on Women, 2006). The report also showed that girls who marry earlier are more likely to believe that their husband has the right to beat them and that he is the only one who can make decisions on issues such as contraception and having children.

Recently on October 31st, 2022, the Indonesian Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection Ministry organised a campaign in Jakarta to stop violence against women and children, especially in light of child marriage. The ministry organised a walk through the city to raise awareness of the issue. Reporting on this event, the Antara Indonesian News Agency wrote that according to a 2021 survey (National Women Life Experience Survey), one out of four women in the 15–64 age group reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence (Fardah, 2021).

Child marriage is also linked to a higher rate of sexual violence, which includes marital rape (which is still not considered illegal under Indonesia’s Criminal Code).



Still from the Family Planning Association (PKBI) provocative campaign to stop child marriage. Source: Family Planning Association (PKBI) via Suara PKBI on Youtube, 2020.

b. Risk to the health of mothers and children

Child marriage can have many negative consequences on girls' health: from more complications during childbirth, higher chances of contracting HIV and AIDS and health complications linked to unsafe abortion. Generally, child marriage is linked to having children at a younger age but also having more children in total.

In an analysis of the 2022 Indonesian Family Life Survey (IFLS), Cameron, Suarez and Wieczkiewicz (2022) found that married children are less likely to get pregnancy check-ups, take iron supplements or have blood tests during pregnancy, which can lead to complications down the line. In general, "child marriage, other things equal, is also associated with a significantly lower probability of the woman having a medically supervised birth" (Cameron et al., 2022). This also means that children born out of child marriage are more likely to be underweight and suffer from stunting, which is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "the impaired growth and development that children experience from poor nutrition, repeated infection, and inadequate psychosocial stimulation." The same study showed that in addition to the complications for physical health, children born out of child marriage are also more likely to have slower cognitive performance.

Furthermore, mortality rates linked to childbirth (both for the mother and for the child) are also higher in cases of child marriage: 'Early pregnancies are known to be associated with a higher probability of maternal mortality (...) greater probability of her child dying before the age of one' (Cameron et al., 2022).

Child marriage can also lead to health complications such as HIV. This is because there is a link between child marriage and the probability of having unprotected sex (Frontline Aids, 2021). For example, in the province of Papua, where HIV rates are among the highest in Indonesia (2.15 to 2.3 percent), there are significant risks of infection when young people do not have access to contraception or women are raped in cases of child marriage (Ross et al., 2020).

c. Higher risk of leaving education, high rates of illiteracy for child brides

Child marriage can be a barrier to returning to education, especially for girls who often have the burden of household responsibilities, forced gender norms, forced exclusion and stigma around pregnancy. This means that once a girl gets married, she is unlikely to return to school (Girls Not Brides, n.d.). Statistics from Indonesia show that child marriage is closely associated with lower educational attainment, including higher chances of working in the informal sector (Cameron et al., 2022). Consequently, this means that children from child marriage are more likely to be working for lower salaries and with less

work stability. They are also likely to have lower household living standards and less available income for consumption, especially for boys (in the case of girl-boy child marriage as opposed to girl-older man child marriage) who tend to have the burden of providing for the family.

Therefore, the link between education and child marriage occurs both before (children who do not go to school are more likely to marry early) and after (children who marry early are less likely to go back to school), meaning that education can play a crucial role in both stopping child marriage and helping people rebuild their lives after marrying early (Cameron et al., 2022).

d. Lower overall well-being and risks for mental health

In an article entitled, *Happily Ever After? Mental Health Effects of Early Marriage in Indonesia*, Jayawardana states that “women who marry early are 9.6 percent more likely to be depressed”. She found that the effects of delaying the age of marriage by just one year can have a significant impact on girls’ mental health, by improving physical health and facilitating workplace integration. These negative consequences on girls’ mental health can be explained by the violence, isolation, and economic vulnerability they experience in child marriage.

The effects of child marriage are also felt by boys, but often in different ways - Asia News Network reported in 2022 that “An ongoing study held by the Public Health School of the UI found that while child marriage could drive child grooms to depression due to the responsibility to financially support the family, girls were at risk of domestic violence and serious health consequences”. Boys suffer from the burden of having to support young, growing families on their own, often without finishing their education. This specifically concerns the case of young girls marrying young boys (usually as a result of parental pressure) but is less relevant to the case of young girls forced to marry older men (Asia News Network, 2022).

Child marriage also impacts the chances of getting divorced: “Like women who marry early, men who marry early are more likely to experience divorce” (Cameron et al., 2022).

Government Responses to Child Marriage

Other than reforming legislation, according to OCHA services, the government of Indonesia is committed to ending child marriage in the region through establishing development plans and national strategies, and specialised programs targeting specific regions for combating child marriage. The government of Vietnam should commit to their international pledge to promote human rights and fundamental freedom, including freedom of speech, association, assembly, and expression, especially considering its newly elected role as part of the United Nations Human Rights Council.



A 14-year-old girl in Mataram, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, during her marriage procession to a boy of the same age. Source: Armin Hari/UN Women Asia and the Pacific via Flickr, 2013.

a. National Mid-term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020 – 2024

Indonesia's National Mid-term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020 – 2024 has prioritised a target of reducing the prevalent rate of child marriage in Indonesia. In the plan, the government plans to decrease the current child marriage prevalence from 11.2 per cent (2018) to 8.74 per cent by 2024. The government is also targeting to reduce it to 6.94 per cent by 2030 in its effort to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Uchino, 2020).

b. Indonesian National Strategy on the Prevention of Child Marriage

In line with the RPJMN, the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, Gusti Ayu Bintang Darmawati, at a United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA) meeting during the launch of Indonesia's National Strategy on Prevention of Child Marriage on February 4th, 2020, stated, "Child marriage is a serious issue as it impacts girls and women's lives, resulting in poorer health and education outcomes, reduced employability, and higher risks to abuse and violence".

She reiterated the necessity for inter-agency collaboration and the synergy of different actors to address this issue. "Families, schools, religious groups, legal actors, health actors, communities, regions, private sectors, non-government, and international organisations will have different roles to play. We will not be able to eradicate child marriage without any actor. This is our unpostponable agenda, and

we will collaborate and accelerate together” (Uchino, 2020).

The National Strategy on the Prevention of Child Marriage in Indonesia has been developed based on the very inter-agency fundamentals. The representatives from government institutions, NGOs, development partners, religious groups, academia, and youth groups have contributed in one sense or another to this strategy. The development of the national strategy was technically supported by UNFPA, UNICEF, DFAT, and the government of Canada.

The strategy has five dimensions:

- The first dimension is optimising the capacity of the children themselves so that they have resilience and be able to serve as agents of change.
- The second is an environment that is conducive to preventing child marriage.
- The third is increasing accessibility and expansion of services.
- The fourth dimension is strengthening regulations and institutions’ capacity.
- The fifth dimension is strengthening coordination and synergy among different stakeholders to address child marriage.

c. Joint Movement to Stop Child Marriage

A program by the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection (PPPA) was launched in early November 2017 and calls for an end to the practice of child marriage. The program is named “Gerakan Bersama Stop Perkawinan Anak” which means Joint Movement to End Child Marriage. This program mainly focuses on five provinces – West Nusa Tenggara, East Java, Central Java, West Java, and South Sulawesi – that were found to have the highest number of child brides.

The movement is ambitious, aiming to change the public mindset and highlighting the hardships a child bride will have to face for life. The Deputy PPA Minister for Child Growth Lenny Rosalin told Anadolu Agency talking about this program, “We are getting to the root of the problem by attempting to end child marriage. Only after that, we can try to reduce the rate of mother and infant mortality, and increase the quality of education and human development index” (Sapa Institute, 2017).

NGOs and Human Rights Agencies Response



Illustration of a girl in an Indonesian public-school uniform with the word “married” embroidered on where her name should be. Source: © Rizka via UNICEF, 2019.

“By working together to keep girls in school and out of marriage, we can create a world where girls and women are empowered and in charge of their life.”

(Emilie Minnick, UNICEF Child Protection and Gender Specialist, 2019)

The role of NGOs and human rights agencies in Indonesia has been remarkable in combatting the issue of child marriage in Indonesia. They have been involved in establishing National strategies as well as conducting awareness programs on their own to improve the situation.

Life Skills Education is a UNICEF-supported initiative that aims to create change in response to child marriage in Indonesia. It is also part of BERANI, a program where UNICEF collaborates with UNFPA, the Canadian government, and the National Development Planning Agency (BAPPENAS Indonesia) (UNICEF, 2019). Since the end of 2020, BERANI has been working to provide awareness about menstrual health and hygiene, female reproductive health, and the negative consequences of child marriage to girls as well as boys. The participants were also given life skills, such as how to make informed decisions about their future – including the decision not to marry before they are able to complete their education.

According to UNICEF, ending child marriage remains homework for Indonesia as part of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. According to UNICEF, education is a major strategy that has proven to be successful in reducing the number of child marriage globally. “Supporting girls to complete secondary education has been proven to be an important protective factor in the effort to prevent child marriage,” said Emilie Minnick, child protection specialist at UNICEF Indonesia, “Secondary education contributes to providing girls with the knowledge and skills they need to negotiate important decisions as well as increasing opportunities for employment which can reduce poverty” (UNICEF, 2019).

In the last three decades, Indonesia has noted a more than twofold decrease in the prevalence of child marriage. However, the UNICEF-BPS report finds that the trend is stagnant, and the numbers have only decreased by seven per cent in the last seven years. Currently, the number of child marriage in Indonesia remain among the highest in East Asia and the Pacific region (Sapa Institute, 2017).

Conclusion

Child marriage in Indonesia remains a serious issue. It has devastating consequences in terms of girls' exposure to physical and sexual violence, whilst also putting both girls' and boys' mental health at risk. There is also a strong correlation between child marriage and higher levels of illiteracy and work in the informal sector. While Indonesia has already raised the legal age limit for marriage to be in accordance with international standards, the current dispensation system essentially allows the practice of child marriage to continue to thrive. Hence, it is paramount that the government continues to support efforts that will help to end child marriage in the country, such as providing affordable and accessible education to lower-income households, promoting age-appropriate sexual education, as well as other actions that may alleviate the pressures of child marriage. Many studies over the years have provided and shown that actions such as providing better access to education, specifically focusing on educating teens on reproductive health and rights and lastly, promoting gender equality may provide a longer-lasting impact in ending child marriage.

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